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PROGRAM McLaughlin One-on-One STATION WRC-TV

DATE May 19, 1985 11:00 A.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT President Jose Napoleon Duarte

JOHN McLAUGHLIN: This man is the first elected civilian President of El Salvador in 50 years. Can he maintain his nation's fragile democracy against left-wing guerrillas and right-wing death squads?

Born San Salvador, 59 years of age. Wife, Inez. Four daughters, two sons. Roman Catholic. University of Notre Dame, B.S. engineering. National University of El Salvador, lecturer, one year. Christian Democratic Party, a founder in 1960 and Secretary-General for 13 years. Presidential candidate 1972, denied his victory by the military, arrested, tortured, exiled. Returned 1979. Businessman, Caracas, during seven years of exile. President of El Salvador, elected May 1984, 54 percent of the vote. National Assembly Election, March '85. His Christian Democratic party won 54 percent of the vote, 33 seats out of 60, demolishing the right wing. As President, last October he met with the guerrillas trying to overthrow him, notably, rebel leader Guillermo Ungo in La Palma, unarmed, for peace dialogue. On May 16th met privately with President Reagan to review the El Salvador situation.

Jose Napoleon Duarte, President of El Salvador, it's one-on-one.

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MCLAUGHLIN: One of the things that amazes me about you, Mr. President, is your friendship with Guillermo Ungo and Reuben Zamora. Guillermo Ungo ran with you as vice presidential running mate when you ran for President in 1972. Correct?

PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE: That is correct. Yes.

MCLAUGHLIN: Where is he today?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, he's -- I think he's in Panama. And he's traveling all around the world.

MCLAUGHLIN: What does he do?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, he's, I would call it, a diplomatic delegate for the FMLN.

MCLAUGHLIN: He is your enemy.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Yes.

MCLAUGHLIN: He's the head of the guerrillas.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, let me put it this way. He was a democrat. He was fighting along with me in favor of democracy. Then all the problems of the country frustrated him. He became then frustrated of democracy and he thought that the only solution was the violent revolution. So he went out to join the revolutionary groups. And there was a lot of people at that time that thought the same way.

MCLAUGHLIN: He is sincere?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think that he's been sincere. Now he's too much compromised.

MCLAUGHLIN: And you met with him in La Palma and you dialogued with him.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Yes, I did. I was with him in La Palma.

MCLAUGHLIN: And you were with Reumen Zamora. And Reuben Zamora helped found your Christian Democratic Party. Right?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Yes. He was a member of the Christian Democratic Party once. But...

MCLAUGHLIN: Now these men are your enemies. How do you explain that?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, this is what happened, even in the families, when they have difference in ideologies and point of view.

MCLAUGHLIN: They may be your enemies, but this week you met with a friend, and your friend is Ronald Reagan. He

describes you publicly as a close friend. You are a close friend of his, are you not?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, I think that there's been a mutual closeness between President Reagan and myself. I think that President Reagan took the responsibility to try to confront the problems of Central America, and he saw me there walking. And so he's given me...

MCLAUGHLIN: He's given you aid?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: ...understanding, political support, and a economic and a military support.

MCLAUGHLIN: He's given you \$128 million in military aid and \$313 million in economic aid, about \$440 million. Did you get any more aid from him when you visited with him yesterday? Did you ask for more aid?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: The only thing I said is that we need more space and aid to continue on working toward democracy in our country. So I said, "Please, President, keep on helping us, because that will give us space and time to have the initiative on all the fronts and win the war. And not only win the war, but also win the peace, which is more important."

MCLAUGHLIN: Did he tell you he'd give you more? Did he put any dollar figure on it?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No. He only said tht he will continue helping us.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you use any of that economic aid for military purposes?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No. No, we have separated both. The military aid is to strengthen the army. I want a very strong army. And this is the difference not for dictatorship, but for democracy.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you actually see that aid in dollars?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, we don't. We get the armament, we get the equipment, we get the helicopters. We don't handle any money.

MCLAUGHLIN: With regard to the war and the prosecution of the war, has the tide turned for good, do you think, in your favor?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think that we have the initiative.

Just this morning I mentioned to a newspaperman that we have found a [unintelligible] that was making signals up very deep in the land of our country, up to Morozon (?). And we went up there, captured it. Now we're moving it to a port and see what [unintelligible] it is [unintelligible].

MCLAUGHLIN: You really have a certain amount to boast about because your economy, remarkably enough, despite the civil war, has improved for the first time in a long time. The GNP growth rate went up last year. Correct?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: That is correct. We went up to three percent.

MCLAUGHLIN: And your army has become more professionalized.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: And the army has been more professionalized. We're reducing death squads. We're reducing the abuses of authority. We're getting more control on the country. We are -- this is a very remarkable thing that we have done. We have had 100 strikes from labor groups, and we have not one single action of repression.

MCLAUGHLIN: What about private capital, influx of private capital?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: We are also helping the private enterprise. We have given all the rules of the game. Just one day before I left, I gave all the rules for the coffee people, and they're happy about it.

MCLAUGHLIN: You mean the rules of engagement?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, no, the rules of the game, how they're going to play the economy in the country, the private enterprise, and how we could help them on achieving the goals of reactivation of...

MCLAUGHLIN: The guerrillas are still, of course, very active and they have abducted 15 of your mayors, they have kidnapped. Correct?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: They also have killed some of them.

MCLAUGHLIN: And they have killed some of them.

Who is supplying the guerrillas?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: There is no question that they come from Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you have proof of that?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Oh, sure. We have thousands and thousands of proofs.

MCLAUGHLIN: Say, from Nicaragua. Do you have proof?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: We have documents. We have all kinds of documents. We have just captured a guerrilla leader by the name of Nida Rios (?), and she had thousands of papers.

MCLAUGHLIN: That's not Napoleon Romero?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, that's not Napoleon Romero. That's Nida Rios. That's a woman who was a commander. And she was full of documents who contain all the information.

MCLAUGHLIN: What percentage of the armaments that go to the guerrillas come from Nicaragua?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, this is Romeros Castillano (?) who said that 70 percent.

MCLAUGHLIN: Now, he's a defector from the guerrillas.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He is a defector from the guerrillas.

MCLAUGHLIN: He was a commander.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He was a commander. He was a political commander of the central front.

MCLAUGHLIN: What's he saying?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He's saying that 70 percent of the armament come from Nicaragua.

MCLAUGHLIN: Well, there are some members in the Congress who don't agree with that. For example, they quote a former CIA man by the name of McMichael, David C. McMichael, who was monitoring the flow of weaponry from Nicaragua to El Salvador. And he said the contention of this Administration that there is a flow over the past three years is not true. And he became disgusted and he went to Managua. And now he's picking cotton in Nicaragua.

How do you explain that?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, maybe his ideology was [unintelligible] before he went to Nicaragua.

MCLAUGHLIN: You think it's a question of his being a

Marxist?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, why is he doing that? But that I wouldn't like to discuss. I think that any person has the right to take his own...

MCLAUGHLIN: I want to talk to you about the Nicaraguans a little bit more, but I have a question for you. Do you think that the CIA has penetrated the Sandinista junta?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I don't know.

MCLAUGHLIN: Last fall, in an interview with Playboy magazine, you said that you thought they had.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, I had never said that. They might interpret it that I did. But I try never to say anything that I don't know, and I don't really know anything on the infiltration or control, or anything, of the CIA in the Sandinista government.

MCLAUGHLIN: When we come back I want to talk to you about the trade embargo that President Reagan has imposed upon the Nicaraguans.

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MCLAUGHLIN: The President of the United States introduced a trade embargo against Nicaragua. Do you approve of that embargo?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, let me put it this way. I cannot express opinions on the United States policies. But there is no question that I feel that the attitude of the United States is not only, but the response of the attitude of Nicaragua. And you heard what he said, what President Ortega said. He said, "I will not talk to the dogs. I will talk to the owner of the dogs." This is the language of the [unintelligible] and the attitude that Nicaragua is having not only with the United States, but with everybody.

MCLAUGHLIN: The press spokesman for the President told reporters that you support the trade embargo.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, I support all the measures that will move in the direction of peace in the country.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think a trade embargo will work?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think that they are presenting these actions to try to obtain the Nicaraguan government to move in the direction of democracy.

MCLAUGHLIN: You think a trade embargo is a good idea.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think that if you analyze it from the political international point of view, I think that the problem is that the trade embargo will work on the democratic-influenced countries, but not on the Communist-influenced countries. And I think that this is the reason why immediately after the trade embargo started, Mr. Ortega went to Russia.

MCLAUGHLIN: Well, if the trade embargo is working, which apparently it is, as you say, why don't you join the embargo?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, we don't have to, because Nicaragua owes us \$200 million.

MCLAUGHLIN: They owe you 200 million?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Yes, sir.

MCLAUGHLIN: But you still trade with them.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, we have to collect our money.

MCLAUGHLIN: Oh, I see.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: It's not a matter of...

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you approve of Ronald Reagan's peace proposal of April?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Oh, definitely. I propose all the peace actions that will try to look for Central America, and Mr. Reagan has proposed a humanitarian action and a peace proposal.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you favor aid, military aid by the U.S. Government to the Contras who are fighting the Sandinistas?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Here, I have two points of view. One is I cannot commit myself on supporting guerrilla groups in another country. Because if I do that, then I will be accepting the Nicaraguans who [unintelligible] guerrillas in El Salvador. But I do understand that we need a barrier to stop the flow of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador. And the Contras have been like, with the ships that they have in the gulf and the radars and all that makes a barrier. And that barrier is in favor of our country.

MCLAUGHLIN: Well, if on the one hand you support his peace proposal, his peace initiative of April, in which he said that at the end of 60 days, if there is no movement, we will then

give military aid to the Contras, and now you say you can't support military aid to the Contras...

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, wait a minute. You have to distinguish my proposition. I say I cannot support guerrillas in another country. But the support of the Contras has been a barrier to stop flow of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador. That I support because that helps my country.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think the Contras can win?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, I don't think that any guerrilla could win against any country unless there is a democratic action inside.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think that the Sandinistas will give up?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, I think that they will keep on fighting. But I think that the only solution in Nicaragua is that inside, democratic forces like the church, like the private enterprise, like the unions and all that, they should get together and support so that the democratic actions inside will not surrender to the Communists. And that is the difference of concept that I have.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think the United States -- there's another way, too, and that's the military solution. Do you think the United States should invade Nicaragua?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No, I don't think so. I don't think they will. And if you analyze the position of Mr. Reagan, you will see that he's not thinking of invading. He's trying to stop the cancer to spread around.

MCLAUGHLIN: Now, in your own country, do you find that the guerrillas who are fighting you, who are being fed by Nicaragua and Russia and Cuba, as you say, are they coming over now to join you? Are you getting -- is there some leakage in your direction?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Oh, yes. Yes. We had more than 500 people who had surrendered and that they have left the guerrillas and come into the government.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you also find that, in addition to their coming over, has the death squad activity ceased or...

PRESIDENT DUARTE: They have reduced considerable.

MCLAUGHLIN: When you took office 500 people were being killed a month.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: And not only that, there were a whole organization behind these death squads. And now we have solved that and we are reducing the actions. And I have a very good criteria, and that's the every-month report to the Red Cross, the International Red Cross.

MCLAUGHLIN: How many being killed a month?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, on this -- let's call them this unknown causes, I had last month four cases.

MCLAUGHLIN: The number we see in the reports here is 30 a month.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, this is the overall...

MCLAUGHLIN: What percentage of those are due to left-wing activity?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I would say 70 percent.

MCLAUGHLIN: Seventy percent, about two-thirds, a little more than two-thirds.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: That is correct.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think that because of the abduction of the mayors and the terrorist activities by the guerrillas, the left-wing guerrillas against the civilians, that there will be a resurgence of right-wing death squad activity in retaliation?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: No. I think that this is the action of the left against the democratic policies. This is a fight in a political war and against the democratic action of the elections. The guerrillas are acting against the mayors and they're kidnapping them and killing them. But this is a confrontation between the government and the guerrillas. The death squads have nothing to do with that.

MCLAUGHLIN: In Argentina there's a civilian president, as you know, and he has reopened many, many cases where there was violence against civilians, and torture and abuse and killing. Forty thousand civilians have been killed in El Salvador in the last, what, five years?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Five years. Yes.

MCLAUGHLIN: Are you going to reopen any of those cases, as they're doing in Argentina?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: We have. I just presented the

National Assembly with a law so that we can install an institute for investigation and foreign laboratories -- forensic laboratories and investigation laboratories, so that we can get the technical know-how how to start investigating.

MCLAUGHLIN: And you're trying to stabilize your criminal justice system.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: And also I have presented a law in which we have made a commission to study all the laws of the country, so that we can control that.

MCLAUGHLIN: I have one quick question for you before we go to the next segment, and that is this: In the United States, Mr. President, there are 500,000 Salvadorans. The State Department says we don't want them. They are not here seeking asylum from danger, they are not here trying to escape persecution. They are, quote-unquote, economic migrants, half a million.

Do you want them back?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, I'll be delighted if you give me permission to ask the people in the United States to let them stay in the United States. Because this is [unintelligible] El Salvadoran people who have come to this country to try to make a living, and they are helping their own people in their own country. So I think it's part of the aid that we're getting in order to reestablish the economy in our country.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think that the State Department should relax its policies towards these Salvadorans?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think so. This is my belief.

MCLAUGHLIN: When we come back I want to talk to you a little bit more about the conditions in El Salvador.

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MCLAUGHLIN: You met with the guerrillas twice last year and they want to meet with you again in June in private, and then in public. Are you going to meet with them?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: My proposition is that we should work on conversations to make sure that we will obtain goals of humanizing the conflict. And if that is so, then I'm ready to meet with them.

MCLAUGHLIN: Now, have you made it easy for the guerrillas to put down their arms and join the...

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I've been trying everything I can.

MCLAUGHLIN: You provide amnesty?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I have provided all kinds of actions. They have surrendered for hundreds, and I gave them all the help I can.

MCLAUGHLIN: What sticks in the throat, the bone that sticks in their throat is they want to have power before elections, and you're saying no: If you want to have political power, you must do what I do, and that's stand for election.

Is that the essence of it?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: That's democracy.

MCLAUGHLIN: And is that the essence of the problem?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: That's the essence of the problem. They have seen the method of violence to seize power. And this is the same thing that the extreme right is trying to do: use death squads to seize power. And both are wrong.

I am asking the people to decide for themselves their own destiny. And for that, we have to respect the democratic rules.

MCLAUGHLIN: You are willing to talk to your enemies, the guerrillas, even though they were once your friends, like Zamora and Ungo. But the Sandinistas will not talk to the Contras.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Because they're not democrats.

MCLAUGHLIN: In addition to that, the Contras, as one told me, the leader of the Contras sitting in the chair you are in, Mr. President, he said to me, "We do not want power-sharing. We want a restoration of democratic freedoms."

Despite the fact they don't want power-sharing, as your guerrillas do, the Sandinistas will still not talk to them. How do you explain that?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, obviously, this is the same thing that Castro did in Cuba. This is the Communist totalitarian method. The moment they seize power, they don't give it away. And they don't want to talk, they don't want to discuss. They only want to...

MCLAUGHLIN: Why?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Because they're totalitarians. And

in a democratic regime, a democratic regime is based on participation. It's based on having everybody a capacity and the right to speak and to try to express his own thinkings. And this is what I'm trying to do.

MCLAUGHLIN: Is it essentially an attitude towards power?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: It is essentially, for the totalitarians, an attitude toward power. And it is essential for democracy the participation of all.

MCLAUGHLIN: Two quick questions. Has Ortega permanently scarred himself by his tour of Eastern Europe? Has he scarred himself, disfigured himself as far as the United States Congress is concerned?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: Well, I think that what he's doing is showing what he really is. And he's a Communist.

MCLAUGHLIN: And a big tactical mistake.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think it's a big tactical mistake.

MCLAUGHLIN: And secondly, the Contadora process. Clear up something for me. Are you in favor of the process involving Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and Panama?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I am in favor of the 21 points. Not in favor of who's there, but in favor of the process of the 21 points, which I believe are human programs for all.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you think Ronald Reagan and the State Department has enough respect for the Contadora process, or should they treat it with more respect?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think that Mr. Reagan is in favor of the Contadora. He told me that yesterday. And I discussed with him that, and I said that the only thing that worries me is that this Contadora process meets the will of the four or the five Central American countries. And if one of them don't have the will to comply with and to obey the rules...

MCLAUGHLIN: You said that.

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I said that.

MCLAUGHLIN: Which one does not have the will?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: I think Nicaragua doesn't have the will. And this is the reason why I am fighting inside Central America to strengthen this will.

MCLAUGHLIN: When we come back I'm going to ask you the mega-question.

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MCLAUGHLIN: We have 20 seconds.

What does Fidel Castro stand for in your mind?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He's a Communist and he's supporting Nicaragua and supporting the guerrillas in El Salvador.

MCLAUGHLIN: What does Pinochet stand for in Chile?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He is an extreme rightist dictatorship.

MCLAUGHLIN: What does Duarte stand for?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He stands for liberty.

MCLAUGHLIN: Liberty throughout. Does he stand for free enterprise?

PRESIDENT DUARTE: He stands for free enterprise. He stands for the people. He stands for democracy. He stands for peace.

MCLAUGHLIN: Thank you very much for being my guest on One-on-One.